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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000421

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CLASSIFICATION TO SECRET)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: (U) PROMINENT KURDISH POLITICIAN MAHMUD OTHMAN
SAYS NONE OF THE PRIME MINISTER CANDIDATES ARE "FIT TO
LEAD"

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR Robert Ford for reasons
1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (S) Summary: In a February 8 meeting, outspoken
Kurdish negotiator Dr. Mahmud Othman bitterly
criticized the Prime Minister candidates as unfit to
lead and claimed that the Shia Islamist Coalition's
delay naming its prime minister candidate had made
Iraq look foolish. Othman urged the U.S. government
to increase the pressure on the Shia Coalition to
begin serious negotiations. He proclaimed that
Fadhila's Nadim al-Jabiri would be the best choice,
although SCIRI's Adil Abd al-Mahdi would be more
capable. According to Othman, during working level
meetings on government formation with the Shia
Coalition on February 7, the Shia delegation had
informed the Kurds that there were five non-
negotiable issues for the Shia: (1) excluding former
Prime Minister Ayad Allawi from participating in the
new government, (2) de-Ba'athification, (3)
counterterrorism, (4) preventing any changes to the
Constitution, and (5) federalism for the south.
Othman also brought up the problems of terrorism and
corruption in Iraq, which he claimed both the U.S.
and the Iraqi Government had inadequately addressed.
PolOff pushed back on Othman's recent interview on
the U.S presence attracting terrorists to Iraq -
Othman claimed the paper had twisted his words - and
urged that Othman be more careful in the future.
End Summary.

(U) "They're All Unfit!"

12. (C) In a February 8 meeting, Dr. Mahmud Othman, a
member of the Kurdish government negotiation team,
stated that none of the prime minister candidates
were fit to lead Iraq. He angrily claimed that the
Shia Coalition had made Iraq a laughingstock in
front of the world. The government formation
negotiations, he asserted, could have started fifty
days ago. "The people are suffering from lack of
security and services, and the leadership only goes
from party invitation to party invitation - how are
any of them fit to lead?" he asked. The Shia are
unwilling to make the difficult decisions, he said,
and therefore refuse to select their Prime Minister
candidate. Othman urged the U.S. government to
increase the pressure on the Shia Coalition. The

Shia street is likely to revolt soon if progress is not made, he predicted.

13. (C) Othman proclaimed that Fadhila's Nadim al-Jabiri would be the best choice, although SCIRI's Adil Abd al-Mahdi would be more capable. Abd al-Mahdi's ties to Hakim make him very dangerous, Othman opined. Current Prime Minister Ibrahim Ja'afari is problematic for many Iraqis, especially the Kurds. The Kurds had had too many disappointments with Ja'afari's leadership, he stated. Al-Jabiri, on the other hand, is non-sectarian, free from Iranian ties, and has an open point of view. Unfortunately, he is too weak and would be too dependent on others to lead effectively.

(U) Government Formation Negotiations

14. (C) According to Othman, during working level meetings on government formation with the Shia Coalition on February 7, the Shia delegation had informed the Kurds that there were five non-negotiable issues for the Shia: excluding former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi from participating in the new government, de-Ba'athification, strong measures against terrorism, preventing any changes to the Constitution, and federalism for the South. (Othman wryly noted that the Shia defined any who disagreed with them as "terrorists.") Those who did not agree with the Shia Coalition's position on these five issues would not be allowed in the cabinet, Othman told us. (Comment: Senior KDP official Rowsch Shaways on February 9 confirmed to us that the Shia had raised these issues with the Kurds on February 7. See septel. End Comment.)

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15. (C) There will also be difficulty with the Shia over ministries, said Othman. The Shia delegation claimed during the talks on February 7 that the Ministry of Interior position belonged to the Shia, and they would not allow a Sunni Arab or a non-partisan person to have it. The Shia are too vengeful, lamented Othman. After the No-Fly Zone was negotiated in 1991, Othman continued, the Kurds forgave the two Iraqi divisions who surrendered to the Kurds and sent them home with honor. The Shia will not show similar mercy, he said.

(U) Terrorism and Corruption - Iraq's twin evils

16. (C) PolOff then confronted Othman about his interview with the London-based Arabic newspaper Asharq al-Awsat on February 7, in which he accused the U.S. Government of encouraging terrorists to come to Iraq to fight the U.S. Othman immediately denied saying this, and claimed the paper misrepresented his position. He explained that under Saddam Hussein Iraq used to fear only state-sponsored terrorism. While Iraqis were grateful for liberation from Hussein, the increasingly complicated social and political landscape in Iraq now included several different groups of terrorists with varying agendas. Some view themselves as "freedom fighters," some object to the current Iraqi Government, and yet others are committed only to fighting the Americans wherever they can. PolOff suggested that he explain his comments more fully in press interviews to avoid this confusion in the future.

¶17. (C) The problem of corruption is also rampant, said Othman. Unfortunately, there was some corruption during the CPA administration, and definitely the three Iraqi administrations - the Governing Council, the Allawi government, and the Ja'afari government - suffered from widespread corruption, he alleged. Corruption is as bad for Iraq as terrorism, Othman said. Both the U.S. Government and the Iraqi Government have inadequately assessed these situations, Othman said, and the Iraqi people have suffered as a result.

(U) Comment

¶18. (C) Othman is a longtime Kurdish political figure who is more respected in the community for his past association with Mulla Mustafa Barzani (current Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masud Barzani's father) than his current political influence. He has, however, been named to the Kurdish negotiating team on government formation talks, and is known and trusted to some extent by both the KDP and the Talabani-led Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Othman is the nominal independent; he formed his own party, the Kurdistan National Struggle Organization, in the late 1970s. He, like Presidency Council Chief of Staff and Talabani aide Kamran Karadaghi, has the advantage of being an insider while retaining some veneer of independence from the two main parties.

KHALILZAD